

# THE MINI MASTERPIECE

By Jennifer Sergent

**Angelina Jolie's decision** to wear a veil decorated with her children's artwork during her August wedding to Brad Pitt was a clever idea, even if it's of little help to the many parents overwhelmed by their kids' masterpieces. "Every single day I've had something—since she was 3 months old!" says Ellen Hatherill of Bethesda, whose daughter, Greta, remains prolific at the age of 20 months. The march of art-class souvenirs generally drops off after elementary school graduation—but that's a lot of drawings, clay sculptures and paint on construction paper to contend with in the interim.

Every parent with a young child in school or day care is faced with the guilt-ridden choice between which art stays and which goes into the circular file. The next decision, of course, is what to do with the keepers. We asked local designers and creative homeowners for tips on how to incorporate children's art into a home's décor.





Ellen Hatherill hangs artwork by her daughter, Greta, on wires in the dining room of their Bethesda home.

**HANG IT UP.** An obvious suggestion, but that's what Hatherill does in the most literal sense, using wire and clips from Ikea on the big, blank wall in her dining room. Hatherill and her husband, Brent, plan to remodel soon, so they didn't want to splurge on a large piece of formal artwork. Instead, she strung two lengths of wire across the wall, one above the other, where she hangs Greta's latest works from clips. She takes photos of everything and stores them in her computer, she says, "so I have no qualms about throwing them away when I swap them out." The dining room is painted beige and has wood furniture. "It begged for something colorful," Hatherill says. "This is a way to get our splash of color that means something to us in that room."

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Designed by Lori Graham, this Chevy Chase home (left and below) features framed, matted kids art throughout.

**FRAME IT.** Bethesda designer Marika Meyer was surprised to discover recently that what she thought was abstract art in a client's home was actually the framed work of her client's child. Proper framing, Meyer says, can have a big impact. "It's a really great way to get individual, unique art on a budget," she says—as long as it's done right. If you find a frame you like, Meyer suggests buying 15 of them on the spot. "Frames are one of those items that always seem to get discontinued," she says. And because children's art can be so colorful and loud, she says consistency in the frames helps tone it down and create a uniform look.

**USE MATS.** "If you don't mat the kids' art, it looks like kids' art," says Washington, D.C., designer Mike Johnson, who works for design firm Lori Graham Design + Home and has incorporated kids' art into the homes of multiple clients in Bethesda and Chevy Chase. "If you mat the kids' art, it looks like it came from a gallery." Parents need not worry, however, that their kids' "gallery" will cost as much as the real thing. Stores such as Pottery Barn sell pre-matted frames in box sets (that store's version is called Gallery in a Box), and designers swear by the inexpensive matted frames at big-box stores such as Ikea and Michaels.

**OUTLAST CHILDHOOD.** Designer Deborah Kalkstein's children are grown, but a visitor wouldn't know it from looking around her Potomac home. "I've saved every piece of art that my people made. It's always been part of our house," says Kalkstein, who owns Contemporaria, a high-end modern furniture store in Georgetown. Even after a major renovation, the art is still prominent. A gallery of it, all in black frames, dominates the breakfast area in the kitchen. Clay sculptures peek from bookshelves. A cracked face made of Play-Doh hangs framed in Kalkstein's walk-in closet. "My kids are always going to be my kids," she says, referring to Camille, 21, and Kevin, 19. Just because they leave elementary school doesn't mean you have to take down the art. "It brings me warmth. For me, that's a very important feeling."



PHOTO BY JUSTIN TSUCALAS

Designer Deborah Kalkstein's Potomac home is filled with the artwork of her two children, now grown.



**CUT OUT THE BEST PARTS.** No one ever said you had to hang your child's art exactly as he or she created it. Karen Sommer Shalett of Chevy Chase, whose home is shown above, came to that conclusion when she was trying to place her sons' artwork into a collection of frames she'd already purchased. Two of the frames were too small to accommodate any of Nathaniel or Simon's art, so she was forced to get creative. Because so much of the art lacks a specific focus, or "it's all the same colors and a bunch of swirly lines," she says she cut out and saved the most interesting details. "It tells a really nice color story," she says.

**DEDICATE THE SPACE.** As is true with any collection of like items, displaying children's art together enhances the effect. "Don't frame them and put them around the house all mishmash," Johnson says. "Pick a room, or a space, or a wall." Gaithersburg designer Dana Tydings did just that along a staircase in a North Bethesda home (shown above). Used mainly by her clients' children, the staircase leads from the home's bedroom wing down to the mudroom and kitchen. Tydings purchased black frames from Crate & Barrel "to offset the brilliant colors of the artwork," she says. The long stairwell offers plenty of space to grow, so new frames can spread out from the center as more art comes home. Even if you run out of space, Marika Meyer says not to worry. Most pre-made frames open easily in the back; just slide new artwork in front of what's there. That way the kids' gallery doubles as storage for the older works.



**BRING IN THE PROS.** It's no surprise that businesses have cropped up to convert children's artwork into finished products such as framed collages, throw pillows and oversize canvases. New York designer Jan Eleni will take more than 100 of your child's creations, edit them, and reproduce them as a singular piece of art, such as the one shown above. Photo websites such as Shutterfly can convert the art into large canvas prints, or apply it to items from tote bags to coffee mugs. And then there's 19 Queens Gate, a website that will highlight the most interesting details in the art and reproduce them on living-room-worthy throw pillows. ■

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